

Śrīla Kavi-karṇapūra beautifully describes the seasons in Vṛndāvana. In the first part of the winter, he writes, the bodies of water become cool and lotuses decrease in number. The nights become longer, enhancing the happiness of the gopis, who smear heating saffron ointments on their bodies and put heating spices in the tambula. The frost competes with the heat of the sun for sovereignty. This time is known as mārṅa-śīrṣaḥ and it begins in November. As the season further progresses, it turns into māgha-ṛtu, the coldest part of the winter. Effulgent misty fog rises from the ponds and the lotuses can no longer bloom. The gopis do not wear pearls, which are cooling.

Winter has a charm of its own. Walking to the VIHE through the ISKCON gośālā, my feet sink in the cold dust that forms the land of Vṛndāvana—Ramaṇa Reti, “the charming sands.” Bulls and cows are taking advantage of the meager sun rays before night returns, cold and dark. There are hardly any leaves on the trees. Monkeys are searching for food. In spite of the biting cold kīrtanīyas are not disturbed. Throughout the night, here and there along the parikramā mārga, while most of the inhabitants sleep under as many blankets as they could secure, the incanting voices of the akhaṇḍa kīrtana groups pierce the silence and spread like a timeless echo through the atmosphere. Undisturbed, long before dawn, Vrajavāsīs circumambulate Vṛndāvana barefooted, taking a Name at every step. From my āśrama, I can hear the bell from the Kṛṣṇa Balarāma temple ringing rhythmically, like an urgent reminder. In the morning the sun seems to take a

## Highlights

- ✦ Bhakti-śāstrī 2016 Closes
- ✦ Winter Retreats at Govardhana
- ✦ Vaiṣṇavī Retreat in Nepal
- ✦ Russian Bhakti-śāstrī
- ✦ Upcoming Courses



Winter darśana

lot of time to rise. The pinkish, red fiery ball on the horizon gives light, but no heat before quite some time. Some use woolen beadbags to chant japa. And all await the darśana of Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa



Balarāma, whose beauty removes all discomforts. Winter months are peaceful. Gone are the Kārtika crowds. Another few weeks and spring will bring in flowers and a gentle warmth.

At the VIHE the winter semester is in progress. Some of the Bhakti-vaibhava students are absorbed in the first glimpses of Kṛṣṇa given in the First Canto of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, while others are discovering the teachings of Maitreya Muni. Sanātana Gosvāmī's prayer to the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam puts one and all in a humble devotional mood.

*asādhū-sādhuta-dāyinn  
ati-nīccatā-kara  
hā na munca kadācin mām  
premaṇa hṛt-kaṇṭhayoḥ sphura*

“O Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, O giver of saintliness to the unsaintly, O uplifter of the very fallen, please do not ever leave me. Please become manifested upon my heart and my throat, accompanied by pure love of Kṛṣṇa.”

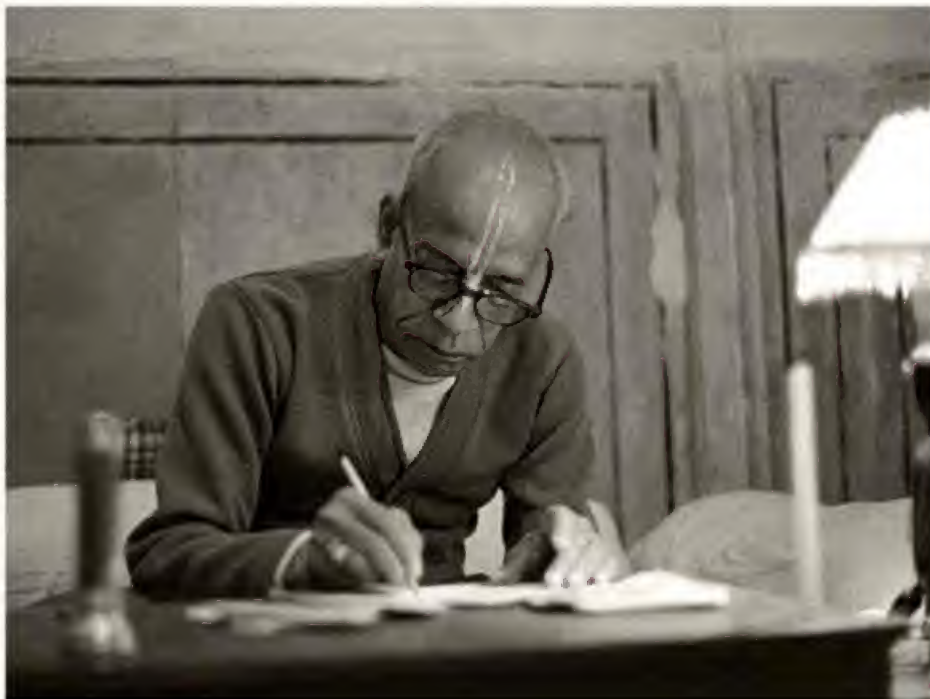
The teachings awaken our consciousness, churning our hearts very deeply, and then again we sink into forgetfulness. In his purport to Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 3.7.21, Śrīla Prabhupāda advises one to hear for a long time—“serious devotional service can develop by hearing for long

periods of time.” Day after day, with faith, we surrender to the process of Bhāgavata-śravaṇa.

On the first floor of the building the Russian medium Bhakti-śāstrī is in full swing. They seem relaxed, not feeling the cold. Most of those devotees have come from Russia, where temperatures go way below zero. They brought with them borsh—a kind of soup made from red beets and cabbage—and other Russian specialties. On Monday afternoons, we all come together in the VIHE temple room for two and a half hours of kīrtana and let the Holy Name unite us beyond dualities. There are different periods in one's life. For those who have come to the VIHE, it is time to hear. “Material subject matter becomes stale, and one cannot hear a certain subject for a long time; he wants change. But as far as transcendental subject matter is concerned, it is called *nitya-nava-navāyamāna*. This means that one can go on chanting and hearing about the Lord and never feel tired, but remain fresh and eager to hear more and more.” (Kṛṣṇa Book 13)

I hope this third issue of the VIHE newsletter finds you engaged in hearing and chanting too, amidst all the duties of life and the preaching mission.

- Praśāntā Devī Dāsī



“Please see that the program for studying our literatures is also undertaken very seriously by all the devotees there. Every one of us must become thoroughly acquainted with our philosophy, so that our preaching work may be carried out nicely.”

- Letter to Jagadīśa,  
27<sup>th</sup> February, 1970



# Outing at Keśi-ghāṭa

By Mādhurya Gaurāṅgī Devī Dāsī

Bhakti-yoga is not just a sentiment or, as Prakāśānanda Sarasvatī had pointed out, performing art such as singing and dancing. It is firmly based on the most profound philosophical teachings, the deepest parts of which are hidden from even the exalted Upaniṣads. At the same time bhakti-yoga is not a set of dry philosophical exercises, it includes a rich culture of multi-faceted practices and activities. To experience it all, Bhakti-śāstrī students take part in festivals and outings throughout the course.

For instance, when Kartik comes we all set out for Keśi-ghāṭa, encouraged by the forbidding words of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī as recorded in the 13th chapter of Śrīla Prabhupāda's Nectar of Devotion.

The day before Rādhā-kuṇḍa's appearance, at four o'clock in the afternoon, students, teachers, and other eager participants got together outside the VIHE temple room and set out on foot on the parikramā marg, carrying the fire of the Holy Name. Just as the nature of fire is to destroy

everything wherever it goes, leaving only ashes behind, in the same way the Holy Name destroys everything undesirable and reveals the pollen of love of Godhead. Dancing in response to the kīrtana led by Sundara Lāla Prabhu from Mauritius, we felt as if sprinkled by that precious golden dust.

At Imli Tala, having caught sight of the graciously flowing Yamunā, we touched our heads to her sandy banks, sipped a few drops of her waters and got into three colorful boats. Our now floating kīrtana, split into three groups, resounded from one bank to the other. We sailed upwards and then downwards, waving at each other as the boats progressed. While we were singing and appreciating the stunning darśana of the ghāṭas, Kālindī received the setting sun in her black waters and slowly took us to an island opposite Keśi-ghāṭa. From there our eyes could meet both banks of the river. On the Vṛndāvana side, the Yamunā āratī ceremony was going on.

The advance party had set up a beautiful altar in the sand, and Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma stood there, welcoming us. As soon as we got off the boats, local Vrajavāsī children with cute faces tried to sell us tiny floating leaf cups to be given to



Boats approach Keśi-ghāṭa



## Do not go to Keśī-tīrtha!

smerām bhaṅgī-traya-paricitām sāci-vistīrṇa-dṛṣṭīm  
vaṁśī-nyastādhara-kiśalayām ujjaḥvalām candrakena  
govindākhyām hari-tanum itaḥ keśī-tīrthopakāṇṭhe  
mā prekṣiṣṭhās tava yadi sakhe bandhu-saṅge 'sti raṅgaḥ

My dear friend, if you are indeed attached to your worldly friends, do not look at the smiling face of Lord Govinda as He stands on the bank of the Yamunā at Keśī-ghāṭa. Casting sidelong glances, He places His flute to His lips, which seem like newly blossomed twigs. His transcendental body, bending in three places, appears very bright in the moonlight."

**PURPORT:** This is a verse quoted from the Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu (1.2.239) in connection with practical devotional service. Generally people in their conditioned life engage in the pleasure of society, friendship and love. This so-called love is lust, not love. But people are satisfied with such a false understanding of love. Vidyāpati, a great and learned poet of Mithilā, has said that the pleasure derived from friendship, society and family life in the material world is like a drop of water, but our hearts desire pleasure like an ocean. Thus the heart is compared to a desert of material existence that requires the water of an ocean of pleasure to satisfy its dryness. If there is a drop of water in the desert, one may indeed say that it is water, but such a minute quantity of water has no value. Similarly, in this material world no one is satisfied in the dealings of society, friendship and love. Therefore if one wants to derive real pleasure within his heart, he must seek the lotus feet of Govinda. In this verse Rūpa Gosvāmī indicates that if one wants to be satisfied in the pleasure of society, friendship and love, he need not

seek shelter at the lotus feet of Govinda, for if one takes shelter under His lotus feet he will forget that minute quantity of so-called pleasure. One who is not satisfied with that so-called pleasure may seek the lotus feet of Govinda, who stands on the shore of the Yamunā at Keśī-tīrtha, or Keśī-ghāṭa, in Vrindavan and attracts all the gopīs to His transcendental loving service.



Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī

~ Caitanya-caritāmṛita Ādi 5.224, translation and purport by Śrīla Prabhupāda ~





Kīrtana at Keśi-ghāṭa at sunset

Yamunā to dance on her waves. But we had prepared our own! Soon the sound of the harmonium, flutes, karatālas, tāmṇṇa and mṛdaṅgas filled the atmosphere. The Market Place of the Holy Name opened and everyone began to buy according to the price they could pay. The little children proved rich! Distracted from their business they began to sing and draw beautiful flowers and other shapes in that very special sand. Looking closer at it, we could see two colors – Śyāma and Gaurī. Indeed, some of the grains of sand looked black and some golden. Singers led, one after the next. In between the mahā-mantra we called out, “Jaya Rādhē! Jaya Kṛṣṇa!” in response to the Śrī Vraja-dhāma-mahimāmṛta of Śrīla Kṛṣṇa-dāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī.

After darkness had set up her camp, hundreds of shining lamps manifested on the banks of the river and began to gently float towards the ocean. We contemplated that wonderful scene. It looked like eager jīvas were queuing up to return back home, back to Godhead. We started singing the Dāmodarāṣṭakam prayers and offering lamps too. Setting them in the leaf cups we had carefully prepared in advance we let our lamps go in the waves of the Yamunā, praying to join the rest of the fortunate ones floating back home.

Then came the time for Vṛndāvana ramya-sthāna, the enchanting song that describes the scenery of the thousand-petal lotus on the Yamunā, far beyond human vision. Stars twinkled gently in the Autumn sky. Such moments bound us forever to Vṛndāvana. Holding tight to the great hope of some day receiving the mercy of the Moon of Vṛndāvana to be engaged in uninterrupted pure devotional service, devotees danced and spun around, raising the sand up in the air and letting it settle on their heads. After several hours, pressured by the time of this world, we concluded our “outing,” which had rather turned into a journey within, by honoring Śrī-Śrī-Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma’s mahā-prasāda. Gathering the paraphernalia, we all left together and returned back to our respective residential places in the late evening.

For me, the best remnants of the day were savored the next morning as I woke up. I did not want to take bath since all my body, including the face, was still covered with Śyāma-Gaurī sand from the Yamunā’s island and my mind echoed the sounds, sights and impressions experienced at Keśi-ghāṭa.



# Four Months of Bhakti-śāstrī End: Now Go and Teach

Excerpts from a speech by His Grace Sārvabhauma dāsa during the Bhakti-śāstrī closing session 2016



We all become young by coming here! To be a student means to be young, and by being with you, teachers also become young. Teaching is a process of learning. When you teach, you get more realizations. Having studied, you must go and teach others, wherever you go. This is what we expect from you. The only learning is by teaching; there is actually no other way to learn. Every time you teach, some new meaning comes out of the same word. Kṛṣṇa reciprocates from inside.

Here the disciples of many gurus come together to study the books of our Founder-Ācārya. This is most important. It will help to unite our movement in the future, although it may not appear like that now. Śrīla Prabhupāda's books are the foundation for all his followers. He has given this nectar to us to become immortal and to make people who are suffering happy. Otherwise the present level of knowledge of the ordinary person is null. Once an invigilator went to a school and asked the students, "Who broke the mighty bow of Lord Śiva in Mahārāja Janaka's assembly?" All the students one after the next said, "Sir, I have not broken it." He asked the teacher, "Who has broken the bow?" The teacher said, "These boys are very honest, they did not break it." Even the teacher did not know. Then the inspector went to the principal. He said, "What is this school? They know so little of the Rāmāyaṇa that they cannot even tell who broke the mighty bow of Lord Śiva in the assembly of Mahārāja Janaka! One student is saying that he has not broken; the teacher is saying the boy is honest!" Finally the principal said, "These naughty students! Sometimes they break windows; sometimes they break tables! So they might have broken the bow. Please forgive them!" He did not know either! This is the state of affairs of the modern, so-called religious people. We do not want to become like that in the future. How to avoid? You learn and teach.

The Bhakti-śāstrī course in Vṛndāvana takes place during the four months of cāturmāsya. Studying the śāstra is the best use you could make of cāturmāsa. In the future we envision the institute with in-house facility. Students will have their own place to live and study 24 hours. That is the future. Come here, study Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, then go and preach, come again here for some time and go to preach again. This is your parent institute and you should keep relation regularly.



Bhakti-śāstrī Closing

## VJHE Calendar

2017 - 2018

Mar 3 - 10	: Seminar - Ṣaḍ-darśana by H.G.Kamala Locana Dāsa
Mar 21 - 26	: International Vaiṣṇavī Retreat in Govardhana
Jun 22 - Oct 22	: Bhakti-śāstrī
Jul - Oct	: Bhakti-vaibhava Canto 4
Oct 24 - 28	: Teacher Training Course 1
Oct 30 - Nov 4	: Teacher Training Course 2
Nov 8 - 13	: Holy Name Retreat
Nov 17 - 24	: Govardhana Retreat
Dec - Mar '18	: Bhakti-vaibhava Canto 1 & 2
Dec - Mar '18	: Bhakti-vaibhava Canto 5 & 6



# The VIHE Winter Retreats – The Abode of śravaṇam-kīrtanam

By Mādhurya Gaurāṅgī Devī Dāsī

Every year since 2006, hundreds of devotees eager to improve their relationship with the Holy Name have been coming together in the small town of Jatipura on the lap of Girirāja Govardhana. The Holy Name Retreat begins two days after Kartik ends. In November 2016, like every year, for six days the vibration of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra emanating from the mouths of the retreat participants filled the already sweet air of Vraja—sometimes in Ter Kadamba, sometimes in Surabhi-kunḍa, at other times in Kusuma Sarovara or at Punchari, the tail-end of Girirāja, but mainly in Jatipura's beautiful Gopinātha's Garden. From early morning till late evening the chanting of the Holy Name, either through japa or kīrtana, took one and all far away from their bodies, minds and everything in this world. Bhūrijana Prabhu and Śacīnandana Svāmī Mahārāja constantly guided the chanters through the labyrinth of distractions, either internal or external, and led them into the realm of devotional meditation and prayer in the shelter of Śrī Girirāja. Becoming beggars at the feet of the Holy Hill, the fortunate sādhakas repeatedly asked for a drop of Govardhana's unlimited mercy to develop sublime attachment to the lotus feet of Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Often there is a complaint about life being very busy. There is so much to do and so much service to render that there is no space for going deep into chanting. All the obstacles having been removed for the time of this precious event, devotees happily raised the white flag of surrender

to the Holy Name. The Holy Name Retreat meant we had been freed. It was up to us to choose how much time to give to chanting or how much time to still remain busy with self-made engagements. All the facilities were there to help us enhance our experience of connecting with Kṛṣṇa. With the timeless writings of Śrīla Prabhupāda and the previous ācāryas acting as favorable winds and our two senior devotee guides assigned as captains, we, little calling-out souls, attentively and carefully journeyed on the saving boat of Kṛṣṇa nāma.

The Holy Name retreat schedule is simple – chanting in the morning, then breakfast, chanting during the day and then lunch, chanting till the evening, and then dinner! In between, Bhūrijana Prabhu gave the strength and the theme for our prayer through Vaiṣṇava bhajanas, and Śacīnandana Svāmī Mahārāja further enlivened us with his sweet and heart-penetrating kīrtana. In the late evening, the kīrtana acted like a transcendental lullaby filling our minds with impressions of life in Vṛndāvana before we took rest.

The VIHE holds two retreats in a row with a three days' break in between. On the off days, staff members, about 40 of them including myself, took the opportunity to go to Rādhā-kunḍa to visit this most sacred place and chant japa together in the early morning's sunrays near Śrīmatī Jāhnavā-mātā's sitting place. At Śrīla Jīva



Decoration night shift



Kirtana at Surabhi Kunḍa



Hare Kṛṣṇa  
Hare Kṛṣṇa  
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa  
Hare Hare  
Hare Rāma  
Hare Rāma  
Rāma Rāma  
Hare Hare



Early morning kathā at Kusuma Sarovara



Jagattārīṇī Devī Dāśī

Hare Kṛṣṇa  
Hare Kṛṣṇa  
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa  
Hare Hare  
Hare Rāma  
Hare Rāma  
Rāma Rāma  
Hare Hare

Gosvāmī's bhajana-kuṭīra, all of us dove into mellow kīrtana and gracious dancing in front of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara. Then the set up for the next retreat started.

The second retreat, the Govardhana Retreat, took yet a different turn in the waves of transcendence. Participants of this retreat immersed themselves into constant hearing of Kṛṣṇa-kathā for eight days. This highly appraised devotional process, together with the chanting of the Holy Name, offers a chance for definite progress towards the stage of love and attraction to Kṛṣṇa, purifying the intelligence and allowing everyone to awaken from amnesia and remember one's real self.

Winter suddenly struck in the middle of the retreat, with thick fog enveloping everything till late morning. The brave and determined started their day in the early hours in the cold pandal, fingering their beads. It quickly warmed up however, when devotees danced during maṅgala-ārati and guru-pūjā. His Grace Mādhavānanda Prabhu for the first three days, and His Grace Ādi-puruṣa Prabhu for the last three days, inaugurated the day's hearing with their respective discourses on Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's Govardhana-vāsa-prārthanā daśakam and the First Three Bhāgavata Dharmas mentioned in Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Canto 11. After breakfast prasādam, His Holiness Śācīnandana Svāmī spoke daily on Śrī Dāmodara-līlā and the afternoon was filled with His Grace Bhūrijana Prabhu's

talks about the subduing of the snake Kāliya, accompanied by sweet kīrtana. Then, later in the evening, when devotees were in a relaxed mindset, Her Grace Jagattārīṇī Devī brought the audience to heights of absorption with her captivating dramatic narrations of the lifting of Govardhana Hill. Throughout the retreat the five of them altogether delivered four presentations per day.

When it all ended, not knowing where all the days had gone, devotees left the little town of Jatipura with strong feelings of separation from Giri Govardhana. Casting longing glances onto

nirupadhi-karuṇena śrī-śācīnandanena  
tvayi kapaṭi-śaṭho 'pi tvat-priyenārpito 'smi  
iti khalu mama yogyāyogyatām mām agrhṇan  
nija-nikaṭa-nivāsaṁ dehi govardhana tvam

Although I am a cheater and a criminal, unlimitedly merciful Lord Śācīnandana, who is very dear to you, has given me to you. O Govardhana, please do not consider whether I am acceptable or not, but simply grant me residence near you.

~ Govardhana-vāsa-prārthanā daśakam ~  
By Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī

the dearest of all hills as we rode away back to Vṛndāvana, we understood we had gotten what we had come for—nourishment and attachment, a drop of the mood Lord Caitanya told us to aspire for. Locking the treasure of Girirāja's mercy in our hearts, we began to pray that we may meet again next year, at the same time and in the same place.



# — GOVARDHANA DARŚANA —







Govardhana Retreat opening



Śacinandana Svāmī and Bhūrījāna Prabhu

## A drop from the Govardhana Retreat 2016 - 'Kāliya-damana Līlā'

Excerpts from a lecture by His Grace Bhūrījāna Dāsa

Some ācāryas say that when the cows drank the water and fell down dead on the edge of the water, the cowherd boys felt that they had lost their lives. In the first edition of the Bhagavad-gītā As It Is, there was an improper translation of 'gorakṣa' or 'cow protection', which Śrīla Prabhupāda was very displeased with. The editor had changed it to 'cattle raising'. From 'cow protection' to 'cattle raising'. There is quite a bit of difference between the two.

The relationship between the cowherd boys and the cows in Vraja was so intimate and affectionate. Practically speaking the cows were like family members. When the boys saw that the cows had drunk the poisoned Yamunā water and fell down dead, they drank the water thinking that they had no reason to continue living and they died too. Of course this is Kṛṣṇa's arrangement. How could something like this happen in Vraja without Kṛṣṇa's sanction? Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura writes that, "Ignoring Kṛṣṇa who was walking slowly behind them, in great thirst, the cows ran quickly to the water and the cowherd boys ran after them." The water was so poisonous that simply by touching that water they all fell down to the ground lifeless. In other words, they had died. 'Salilānte' means just at the edge of the water. They didn't have to go deep in the water. This happened right in Kṛṣṇa's presence.

Śukadeva Gosvāmī is addressing Mahārāja Parikṣit as 'kurūdvaha'—"Oh great hero of the Kuru dynasty," because he wants to encourage Mahārāja Parikṣit. When such great personalities as Parikṣit Mahārāja, who have a developed relationship with Kṛṣṇa, hear about this or any other pastime of Kṛṣṇa where there is distress, they do not take it as a story. They do not take it as a documentary movie or news broadcast. It is not like watching some distress in a far corner of the earth where you don't know anyone. You may see people whose children or parents are crushed in an earthquake, crying and crying and crying, you are watching it, but it doesn't touch your heart because there is no sambandha, no relationship with those people. A very soft hearted person may feel terrible to see any kind of suffering, but when there is a relationship, it's intolerable. So because Mahārāja Parikṣit had such a deep and internal loving relationship with Kṛṣṇa, he experienced intense distress and Śukadeva Gosvāmī felt that he needed some encouragement.

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# Vaiṣṇavī Retreat Held in Nepal

By Prasāntā Devī Dāsī

One hundred and sixty-five devotees gathered in Chitwan, in the Southern part of Nepal, at the foothills of the Himalayan range, for a four-day retreat last September. The resort which served as the excellent venue was reached after a seven-and-a-half-hour rodeo-like ride over winding broken mountain roads from Kathmandu.

Sucāru Gopī Devī Dāsī, the organizer, and Divyā Rādhikā Devī Dāsī, both from Nepal, spoke respectively on “Being a Devotee and a Wife” and “Raising Kṛṣṇa Conscious Children.” Nārāyaṇī Devī chose to speak on “Building Thriving Communities through Personal Qualities Development,” Lakṣmīmonī Devī spoke on “Living a Balanced Life,” as well as “Remembering Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Arrival in the USA and Our Preaching Mission,” and in the evenings we heard “The Life and Devotional Outpourings of Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī.” All topics converged to serve the theme of the retreat—Leading and Serving Unitedly.

Participants from USA, France, Germany, Russia, Poland, and India admired the enthusiasm, kindness, and humility of the Nepali devotees. As all mingled and discovered more of each other’s qualities and activities in this unique, open forum, appreciation for Śrīla Prabhupāda’s all-encompassing mercy grew. All through the morning programs, classes, kīrtanas, and skillful cultural presentations, the participants bloomed as the spirit of devotion spread freely.

On the banks of the nearby Nārāyaṇī River, Nārāyaṇī Devī spoke about Queen Kuntī, of the

essential qualities of a devotee and of the benefits of being a devotee in a woman’s body, contemplating on the natural serving mood of women, born from their dependent prakṛti nature, and remembering Śrīla Prabhupāda’s encouragement to take shelter of a pure devotee to engage in devotional service without reservation. Some Vaiṣṇavīs appreciated the unique and influential position of the mother, the nourishing force that molds the psyche and emotional frame of every child, thus fashioning the makeup of successive generations, pillars of the human society.

At Devghat, by the Kāli-gaṇḍakī River, an hour ride from Chitwan, kīrtanīyas led uninterruptedly from the bus, to the streets, to the banks of the holy river. All danced with arms upraised, forming long parallel lines, while the kitchen crew prepared the breakfast offering, pujārīnīs made garlands for our travelling companion, Śrī Girirāja, and mothers looked after children. Braving the chilly waters, all took a holy dip at the confluence of the Kāli-gaṇḍakī and the Sapta-gaṇḍakī.

During the closing session, groups of participants shared the lessons learnt. Brave Rasamayī Padmāvati Devī Dāsī performed a dance with fire brands. The Holy Name united everyone in dancing and singing till late at night, while devotees performed Girirāja parikramā. It was indeed a festival of leading and serving together. And it will be again and hopefully many times again, in many places.



Nārāyaṇī Devī lectures on Queen Kuntī



165 devotees attend the Retreat



Ready to venture across the Sapta Gandaki



# Russian Bhakti-śāstrī in Full Swing

By Bhaktin Anna Nimaeva



Year 2017 marks the opening of the first Russian Bhakti-śāstrī course in the VIHE. 45 Russian speaking devotees from all over Russia, the former USSR, India and even Europe and USA, ranging in age from 20+ to 50+ are attending classes Monday to Friday on the second floor of the VIHE building. The class schedule is tight, with three classes starting at 8 am and ending at 1.30 pm, followed by a delicious Russian style lunch prasāda. Saturday is reserved for parikramās and special lectures by guest speakers.

Courses for Russian devotees started three years prior to this degree course. These were held at first in Śrīla Prabhupāda's house at the Kṛṣṇa Balarāma Mandira and later in the Śrīla Prabhupāda hall, located in the nearby "Russian House" developed by Śyāmasundara Caraṇa Dāsa to serve as a venue for prasāda and cultural events for the Russian community. With the blessings of H.H. Bhakti Vijñāna Gosvāmī, GBC for Russia and head of the Russian Education Department, a team of dedicated devotees got ready to facilitate the full-fledged Bhakti-śāstrī course.

The teachers deserve a special thank for dedicating time to this service. Among them are H.H. Bhakti Rasāyana Sāgara Svāmī, H.G.

Caitanya Candra Caraṇa Dāsa, as well as H.G. Vrajendra Kumāra Dāsa, H.G. Acyutātma Dāsa, and H.G. Patita Pāvana Dāsa. Russian-speaking VIHE teachers H.G. Adi Puruṣa Dāsa, H.G. Gaurasundara Dāsa and H.G. Rādhā Prema Devī Dāsī also took up the teaching.

Russian Bhakti-śāstrī students feel honored and excited to be part of the first batch of this official BOEX (ISKCON Board Of Education) program. They are eager to study and serve in the Dhāma. Five service teams were formed to take care of cleaning, peeling vegetables and serving prasāda. Each team, named after one of the Aṣṭa-sakhis, does its sevā



Russian-speaking students in rapt attention

on one day of the week, assuring that the facilitation runs smoothly and no one leaves hungry! On exam days a special feast is prepared to celebrate the occasion. The same teams meet daily for small group study facilitated by team leaders.

The ISKCON Disciple Course and Teacher Training Course One will be made available in March. Further courses are being planned for next winter, including Bhakti-śāstrī as well as Bhakti-sadācara. Serious students wishing to study may write to [vihe.russian.admissions@pamho.net](mailto:vihe.russian.admissions@pamho.net).

**Pradyumna:** "If the ear is not engaged in the service of the Lord by hearing about Him in the Bhagavad-gītā or in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, certainly the holes of the ears will be filled up with some rubbish."

**Prabhupāda:** "Yes. This is the secret. We have got the ears, and we have got the sound also. Just like we are reading this book. So if we don't fill up our ears with this transcendental sound, then it will be filled up with some rubbish things. It cannot remain empty. Either you fill up with transcendental message, or you fill up

with rubbish nonsense. Two ways. So if you take care that your earholes are always filled up with the transcendental message of Kṛṣṇa, so there is no scope for rubbish things to enter into it. So therefore our attempt should be twenty-four hours hearing. *Kīrtaniyaḥ sadā hariḥ* [Cc. Ādi 17.31]. Twenty-four hours. As soon as you get time, read books, discuss amongst yourselves. Don't fill up the ears with rubbish things. Then advance will be choked up."

- June 17, 1972, Los Angeles



## Bhakti-vaibhava

### The Systematic Study of the First Six Cantos of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam

Whereas the Bhagavad-gītā, the main book studied at the Bhakti-śāstrī level, has seven hundred verses, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is famous for having eighteen thousand verses. To cover its contents Śrīla Prabhupāda spread its study over two courses – Bhakti-vaibhava and Bhakti-vedānta. Bhakti-vaibhava consists of the study of the first six Cantos. While the VIHE Bhakti-śāstrī course is completed within four months, Bhakti-vaibhava requires four sittings of nearly four months each. In addition to the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam classes the course includes seminars on related topics and books such as, “The Invocation,” “The Ten Topics,” “Sanskṛt Meters,” “The Six Vedic Philosophies,” “Dasa Mūla” of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, “The Southern Ocean of the Nectar of Devotion”, and Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī’s “Tattva Sandarbha”.

Part of the assessment consists of oral presentations lasting from twenty minutes in Canto 1 to one hour in Canto 6. Through these students learn how to present the philosophy and message of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam to various audiences. Stress is put on applying the teachings in one’s own life and evolving a



The Worship of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam

spiritual devotional goal. In between the sittings, devotees are encouraged to preach, teach or share their knowledge and realizations in ways appropriate to their personality. Keeping in mind that Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is meant to create a revolution in consciousness, the Bhakti-vaibhava course, indicated by Śrīla Prabhupāda as a preparation for sannyāsa, naturally helps the sincere souls to turn to Kṛṣṇa and actively focus on His mission. Students are given the facility to study part of the course in campus and the rest by correspondence. Complete attendance is however recommended.

## Kali-yuga Dharma: Nāma-saṅkīrtana

### SB 2.1.11

etan nirvidyamānānām icchatām akuto-bhayam  
yoginām nṛpa nirṇītaṁ harer nāmānukīrtanam

#### Translation by Śrīla Prabhupāda:

O King, constant chanting of the holy name of the Lord after the ways of the great authorities is the doubtless and fearless way of success for all, including those who are free from all material desires, those who are desirous of all material enjoyment, and also those who are self-satisfied by dint of transcendental knowledge.

### Sārārtha-darśini Commentary

by Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura:

In this scripture [Śrīmad Bhāgavatam] it is ascertained that the process for achieving perfection is bhakti. Here we may ask: among the elements of bhakti, which is considered to be the main one, like an emperor? The answer is, nāmānukīrtanam, “constant chanting of the holy name of the Lord after the ways of the great authorities.” Among all the elements of bhakti, three are principal: śravaṇam-kīrtanam-smaraṇam, as is proclaimed in 2.1.5, tasmād bhārata... Among



these three, kīrtanam is the principal, and among different types of kīrtanam, (nāma, or names, līlā, or pastimes, guṇa, or qualities, etc.), chanting of the holy names is the chief.

What's more, the specific type of kīrtanam [nāmānukīrtanam] mentioned here is chanting after the ways of the Lord's devotees, and doing it constantly. Nirṇītaṁ, "ascertained," means "ascertained by previous ācāryas," and not just proclaimed only by me, today. It implies that no further proof needs to be requested. What kind of kīrtana is this? Fearless (akuto-bhayam). This means that there is no fear about purity or impurity, about the proper time, place, performer and circumstances – even mlecchas, who cannot tolerate service to the Lord, do not oppose this opinion! Such is the implied meaning here.

What's more, both for practitioners and the perfect ones there is no higher good, as is seen from the mention of nirvidyamānānām, or those disregarding all objects of material desires, even up to liberation. As far as those desirous of all these objects are concerned, they obtain them according to the logic: "what enters the hub, enters the whole wheel."

Thus, for

- (1) the disinterested – unalloyed devotees,
  - (2) for those desirous – of heaven and liberation etc.,
  - (3) for the yogis – satisfied in themselves,
- this (nāmānukīrtanam) is ascertained [as the means]. It is implied that this kīrtana is both the proper means and the fruit, corresponding to the practitioner and his/her goal.

## Upcoming Courses

### Bhakti-vaibhava

#### ŚRĪMAD-BHĀGAVATAM STUDY

Canto 4:	Jul - Oct '17
Canto 1 & 2:	Dec - Mar '18
Canto 5 & 6:	Dec - Mar '18

#### SEMINARS

The Invocation  
Sanskṛt Meters  
The Ten Topics of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam  
The Six Vedic Philosophies  
Dasa Mūla

#### TEACHERS

Yadunandana Svāmī, Bhakti Dhīra Dāmodara Svāmī, Sārvabhauma Dāsa, Kamala Locana Dāsa, Ādi Puruṣa Dāsa, Praśāntā Devī Dāsī

### Bhakti-śāstrī

June - October 2017

#### CONTENTS OF THE COURSE

Bhagavad-gītā  
Nectar of Devotion  
Nectar of Instruction  
Īśopaniṣad  
Sanskṛt Pronunciation  
Introduction to Deity Worship

#### TEACHERS

Bhakti Dhīra Dāmodara Svāmī (BG, Ch. 1-6),  
Prāṇeśvara Dāsa (BG, Ch. 7-12), Lakṣmimoni  
Devī Dāsī (BG, Ch. 13-15), Ādi-puruṣa Dāsa  
(BG, Ch. 16-18), Praśāntā Devī Dāsī (Nectar of  
Instruction, Sanskṛt Pronunciation), Atula  
Kṛṣṇa Dāsa (Śrī Īśopaniṣad), Mukunda Datta  
Dāsa (Introduction to Deity Worship)





## Teacher Training Courses

### Level One

October 24 - October 28, 2017

### Level Two

October 30 - November 4, 2017

## Upcoming Retreats

### International Vaiṣṇavī Retreat

March 21-26, 2017

The theme of this year's retreat is "Windows to the Spiritual World." The main presenter will be Her Grace Dhṛti Devī Dāsī, one of the artists trained by Śrīla Prabhupāda to paint for the illustration of the BBT books. She will speak on "The Importance of Art in Devotion," "The History of Art in ISKCON," "The Caitanya Caritamṛta Publishing Marathon," and "Śrīla Prabhupāda's Instructions for Artists." There will be three workshops for participants interested in painting. The retreat also features an exhibition of paintings by ISKCON women artists of all ages (in printed form).

Besides the presentations related to art, there will be classes on "Community Spirit" and "Vaishnavi Qualities" by Her Grace Narayani Devi Dasi, on "Namashraya" by Her Grace Yashomati Devi Dasi and on "Krishna Lila" by Prashanta Devi Dasi.

#### For information visit -

facebook.com/vaisnaviretreatinternational, or  
vihe.org/vaisnavi\_retreat.html

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General Administrator  
Courses Facilitator  
Maintenance Manager

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